



Eve Blobaum explores the cultural identity of rural towns decreasing in population.

### While most farmers

think of milo as livestock feed,

sociologist Eve Blobaum thinks of it as a means to research rural communities on the brink of extinction.

Blobaum, assistant professor, sociology, who hails from a small town in Nebraska, will give two presentations as part of the JCCC College Scholars Program:

- *Of Milo and Memories: The Impact of Rural Flight on Community Identity in Post-Depression Rural America* will be at 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 14, in the M.R. and Evelyn Hudson Auditorium of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art. A reception precedes the event at 6:30 p.m.

In southeastern Nebraska, farmers hoped milo, a drought-resistant grain sorghum, would be the “savior crop” that would protect them from the economic ruin of the Great Depression. In one community, residents promoted milo with an annual festival. Decades later, the community is a shadow of its former self, but the festival remains. In her presentation, Blobaum addresses what has happened to the community, tracing the decades-long phenomenon of rural flight and its effects on small rural communities. In light of that, she’ll examine how a particular community maintains its identity even as residents are increasingly tied to activities outside its geographical boundaries.

“In the past, communities were based on geographic similarities – shared space,” Blobaum said. “Communities are more and more based on shared ideologies.”

- *Of Milo and Memories: The Role of Community Festivals in Mediating and Coping with Social Change in Post-Depression Rural America* will be at 11 a.m. Thursday, April 15, in Craig Community Auditorium.

In this presentation, Blobaum explores the ways in which community festivals connect past to present, articulate shared identity and values, and help residents cope with social change. The milo festival celebrated by a small Nebraska town becomes a point of departure in an exploration of what has happened to rural communities and how residents respond to such changes. The festival is analyzed as a symbolic event in which residents celebrate having endured another year.

“Farming is very risky for farmers and for agriculturally based communities. These festivals right around harvest time can be viewed as a collective celebration,” Blobaum said.

While Blobaum’s ethnographic observations about her hometown’s annual festival are academic, they are also entertaining with tales of milo pancakes, pork chop supper, parade, milo queen, threshing demonstrations and who is assigned to what tasks. People with rural roots will share a connection.

Blobaum is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. She has a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Nebraska and a master’s degree in criminal justice and criminology from the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

The JCCC College Scholars program showcases the research of four faculty each academic year. Blobaum is the fourth presenter of the 2009-2010 year.

For more information about the JCCC College Scholars program, contact Karen Martley, director, Staff and Organizational Development, 913-469-8500, ext. 3467. 